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27 July 1988

SUBJECT: Additional Background Information on Canadian Assistance in the Exfiltration of U.S. Embassy Employees from Tehran

N.B. Given the extreme sensitivity over Canadian support to our exfiltration efforts, several aspects of the operation were not committed to paper. The information contained below is primarily based on the recollections of Agency officers involved in the initial planning of the exfiltration operation.

1. Although the Iranians seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979, we were unable to reconcile the numbers of U.S. employees being held captive. The Iranians claimed to be holding 54 hostages: 51 at the Embassy and three at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If this figure were correct, a small number of employees were "missing". [redacted]

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[redacted] visited Headquarters on 16 November 1979. During the visit, which had been arranged before the U.S. Embassy was seized, [redacted] advised six Embassy employees had made their way to the Canadian mission where they sought safehaven. It was stunning and welcome news.

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2. Upon learning this information, [redacted]

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[redacted] Additional officers representing Near East and European Divisions joined Mr. Carlucci to discuss exfiltration planning with [redacted]. The group adjourned to the Director's Dining Room where adequate table space was available to spread out maps of Tehran and Iran. During the ensuing discussion, [redacted] made it plain the Canadians would help in the exfiltration of the Americans but knowledgeability of the presence of the Americans at the Canadian mission and the Canadian assistance must be extremely limited. Two DO participants independently recalled [redacted] stating "the information must not go beyond this room" or "beyond these four walls." Carlucci said the Agency would respect this, but he asked for [redacted] approval to brief one other individual -- the President.

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[redacted] agreed and reemphasized no one other than the President should be aware of our joint planning. One participant recalled [redacted] specifically said the information should not be passed to [redacted]

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[redacted] The participant believed this unusual request added additional weight to [redacted] request for utmost secrecy. While two of the DO officers recalled that [redacted] stipulated Congress not be informed, two other DO officers did not recall a specific statement to this effect. Rather, in subsequent discussions, the Agency officers agreed that the "gentlemen's agreement" with [redacted] contained the implication that Congress not be notified.

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3. Lives were at stake and the information was extremely tightly held within the Agency. In addition, we were concerned with violent retaliation the Canadians would experience at the hands of the Iranian revolutionaries should they become aware of Canadian assistance, extremely tight compartmentation was instituted. The uncertainty of events in Iran and the Middle East was underscored when, during the same time frame as the Embassy seizure in Tehran, militant Muslims destroyed the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, killing an Army Warrant Officer in the process, dependents were evacuated from Kabul because of the instability of the Afghan regime, and the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli was sacked.

4. In sum, [redacted] offered us a means of saving six Americans. He requested absolute secrecy and we agreed. Former DDCI Carlucci took this caveat seriously and specifically requested [redacted] permission to brief the President. Within this context it was clear to the officers involved that Congress must not be briefed on the exfiltration planning. The point is not whether a specific document memorialized a Canadian request not to brief Congress, but rather how experienced Agency officers interpreted [redacted] request. The recollections of those officers involved in the meeting indicated they believed [redacted] statements revealed a clear and consistent need to keep this information on a "close-hold" basis, which was interpreted as precluding Congressional notification.

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